

# DN disabilitynow

the campaigning newspaper that puts you in the picture

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## Beeb boost

BBC Television has launched a series of targets designed to improve the portrayal of disabled people on its channels.

They include having at least one regular disabled character in BBC One drama series, disabled extras playing two per cent of all characters, and key entertainment series such as *The Weakest Link* and *Mastermind* featuring a minimum of one disabled contestant in 50 – all by the end of this year.

BBC Television is also setting up an £800,000 fund to encourage ideas and talent development, and BBC Talent will launch a search for dis-

abled writers, presenters, actors and directors.

BBC Drama will organise a national audit of disabled actors, which it hopes will provide “a definitive guide to UK talent”.

Mat Fraser, who will star with fellow disabled actor Jane Hammond in a BBC2 film in April as part of the channel’s 40th birthday celebrations, said the announcement was “very encouraging” and particularly welcomed the new fund.

He said: “It can only be a good thing. Any target they set themselves is great because it would be too embarrassing for them not to achieve it.”



Ade Adepitan, who appears wheelchair dancing between shows, said the targets were “a positive move”

And BBC presenter Ade Adepitan said it was “a positive move”. But he added: “I hope it’s not something they are doing for publicity. I hope they actually follow through.”

The Disability Rights Commission said it was “extremely encouraged” by the targets, but would like to see them extended to news and

current affairs, including disabled people asked to comment on general news stories.

A spokeswoman added: “The challenge is to ensure these targets are met and that they are backed up by the appropriate investment and commitment.”

Jana Bennett, the BBC’s director of television, said that

“disabled people need to be shown less as minorities with issues and problems, and more as people with lives as rich or as complex as the rest of society”.

The announcement is part of a bigger drive to increase the BBC’s commitment to the recruitment and portrayal of disabled people, with a report due this month.

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## Long-stay nightmare

DN EXCLUSIVE BY JOHN PRING

Disabled people in one of the country’s last remaining long-stay hospitals are living in “shocking” conditions, a former volunteer has told DN.

The adults with learning difficulties are often left to sit for hours in their own urine and faeces and staff eat their puddings and snacks, it is alleged.

Elizabeth Nassem, who volunteered on the Brotherton Villa at Fieldhead Hospital in Wakefield after finishing a psychology degree, and later supported and visited one of the residents, made repeated attempts to convince the hospital to improve standards.

Miss Nassem, who is now studying for a masters degree and working with vulnerable adults in Lancashire, said residents on the villa were dirty, dressed in shabby and torn clothes, and rarely kept occupied and stimulated.

“I was absolutely shocked when I first went on the villa. I didn’t know people lived like that in my local town. It was like something from Victorian times. It is not just that they do live like this, but that they are allowed to live like this.”

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) cannot take a case on behalf of Brotherton residents under the Human Rights Act, but is looking for a lawyer to do so.

A DRC spokeswoman said the case could be “very important” as it highlighted the fact that disabled people do not have the right to independent living.

She said: “Obviously, a lot of long-stay hospitals are going to be closing. There are also a lot of private concerns which will not be up for closure where disabled people’s rights need to be strengthened.”

South West Yorkshire Mental Health Trust, which runs the hospital, said the allegations

were thoroughly investigated and proved “unfounded”, including a visit and investigation by the former Wakefield Community Health Council, another by an advocate who works with the residents and a third by a trust director.

A spokeswoman said West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority and the Social Services Inspectorate were satisfied with how the trust dealt with the allegations.

“We take very seriously our responsibility to provide a safe, caring environment for vulnerable people,” she said.

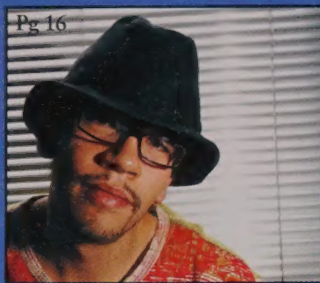
The charity Values Into Action is in talks with the trust about providing human rights training to staff and residents.

All adults with learning difficulties living at Fieldhead are due to move into the community this year, as part of government plans to close all such long-stay provision.

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# Checks chaos

DN EXCLUSIVE BY NUALA CALVI

The case of a convicted criminal previously accused of sexual misconduct, who went on to rape a disabled care home resident, has raised serious questions about background checks on charity volunteers.

Raymond Hatter was taken on by a Scope care home in Colchester. It assumed the charity supplying him, Community Service Volunteers, had run background checks, on the basis of the record CSV supplied.

But CSV, which supplies 130,000 volunteers to charities and local authorities every year, has told DN it does not run Criminal Records Bureau

(CRB) checks on volunteers for external projects.

It supplied Hatter based on recommendations from Thames Valley probation service, which did not include information on the sexual allegations.

Hatter was sacked by Scope when these surfaced in February 2003 but he returned to rape a resident of the home in Colchester in September.

Last month, 20-year-old Hatter was sentenced to life imprisonment by a judge at Chelmsford Crown Court, with a recommendation that he serve at least seven years.

In the wake of the case, Scope, CSV and Thames Valley probation service have all

launched internal reviews into their procedures and Scope has temporarily suspended its use of CSV.

According to the Home Office, police checks are a legal requirement for volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults.

A Scope spokeswoman said: "Charities like Scope rely on volunteers. CSV is well respected and one of the main suppliers of volunteers. There had never been any problems before."

CSV said it had passed all the information it had from the probation service to Scope and made it clear the charity would have to carry out any further checks.

# DRC: don't rush laws

The chair of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has told a parliamentary committee it is too soon for discrimination laws based on the social model of disability.

Speaking at the first public hearing of the committee set up to look at the government's draft disability bill, Bert Massie said opposition from business and other parts of society meant the time was "not right" for a bill based on the social model.

"If someone faces discrimination now, you have to prove

you are disabled," he said.

"With the social model, you would have to prove you were discriminated against."

Mr Massie said he welcomed the bill and thought the duty on public authorities to promote disability equality would have the greatest impact.

"It's far from perfect, but even in its current form it would have a large impact on disabled people."

But he said changes to the definition of disability were needed, especially relating to

people with mental health problems, who find it difficult to prove they are disabled. "When you have a mental illness you have to show that it's clinically well-recognised. This doesn't apply to physical disability."

The DRC also wants the definition of disability extended to cover all progressive conditions, not just cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis.

And on transport, he proposed 2017 as a deadline for rail vehicle accessibility but said 2020 would be acceptable.

# Access promise for new homes

A disability charity has hailed a "breakthrough in housing rights for disabled people" after the Greater London Authority announced that one in ten new homes would now have to be wheelchair accessible or easily adaptable.

The policy is included in the London Plan\*, the capital's new planning and development strategy, launched by Mayor Ken Livingstone last month.

John Grooms Housing Association has been campaigning for all local authorities to bring in ten per cent targets.

David Harmer, the association's chief executive, said: "By adopting the ten per cent pledge, the GLA is setting an excellent example to authorities nationwide and we will be calling on others to follow their lead."

\*www.london.gov.uk

## DN CAMPAIGN



# Cold comfort

A paraplegic woman spent New Year stuck in bed because of severe burns she incurred trying to keep warm.

Marjorie Heywood, 50, was scalded after a hot water bottle she used to keep warm leaked for 15 minutes without her feeling it, burning the skin from her lower back.

She and her partner, also disabled, are not eligible for a winter fuel payment because they are under 60, despite being on higher rate Disability Living Allowance (DLA). They can only afford one gas heater upstairs and one downstairs in their flat in Bury, Lancashire.

Miss Heywood told DN: "I can't use my wheelchair for more than an hour because it will disturb the wounds."

Her partner Geoffrey

Figgins said: "We wrote to [disabled people's minister] Maria Eagle. She wrote back saying you get enough money in DLA for heating, but we're forced to use that for taxis and bills."

Meanwhile, Jim Cunningham MP and Lord Ashley of Stoke raised questions in parliament about extending the winter fuel payment. But Work and Pensions minister Baroness Hollis said only 7 per cent of disabled people suffered from fuel poverty.

But Mike Hurdiss, Scope's benefits officer, said the figure would be much higher among those on the highest rates of DLA, the group DN's campaign targets.

The Scottish Executive said it would consider extending the payment later this year.

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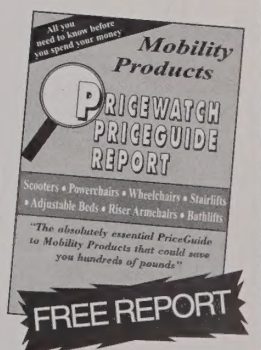
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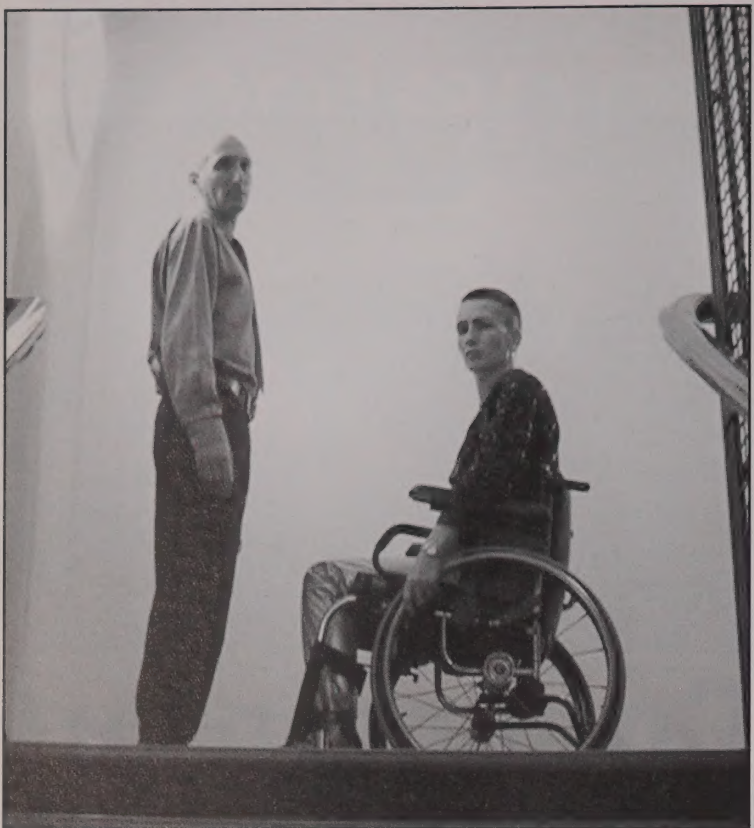
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Opening up: a video by a disabled artist was projected onto the side of a Bradford court building for three days in January. In *Opening Doors*, Ju Gosling (right) takes a light-hearted look at the difficulties faced by disabled people in accessing poorly designed buildings.

## Scrap over-65 rule

Campaigners have called on the government to scrap the rule which prevents disabled people older than 65 applying for support from the Independent Living Fund (ILF).

The Coalition on Charging, an umbrella group of charities, is also calling for wider reform of the ILF.

ILF funding can mean more than £300 a week extra on top of a local authority care package, and can help disabled people stay out of residential care.

Frances Hasler, chief execu-

tive of National Centre for Independent Living, a coalition member, said the ILF rule meant that older people were being unfairly deprived of the chance to live independently.

Other concerns with the ILF include its failure to take disability related costs into account. The coalition is also campaigning for an end to all care charges.

The government said it would look at the issue as its policy for support of disabled people developed.

# School shake-up

A new strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN) promises to "transform" education for disabled children, but campaigners warn it could also undermine their rights to learning support.

The ten-year strategy, launched by education secretary Charles Clarke, focuses on early intervention and personalised learning. It proposes a new "national centre of excellence" for early years support and SEN training for all teachers.

It was broadly welcomed by charities and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC). But both the DRC and National Autistic Society (NAS) warned that plans to give more SEN

funding directly to schools and "reduce reliance on statementing" would make it harder for parents to secure extra support.

Angie Lee, of the NAS, said delegating funding to schools creates variations in provision because the money is distributed according to factors like the number of free school meals, rather than SEN. It allows schools to bypass the statementing system, taking away the legal guarantee of provision.

"The government say they don't want to weaken the legal framework of SEN, but they are tinkering with it through the back door - changing the funding system in order to phase out statements," she said.

Neil Crowther, DRC education policy manager, said one option to help parents would be to extend the Disability Discrimination Act.

Meanwhile, schools watchdog Ofsted found provision for SEN pupils is "very good" in one in five mainstream schools but many lack the means to monitor their progress.

Chief Inspector David Bell told DN: "As schools take more SEN children into the mainstream, they need to understand how to measure progress in smaller steps. If they are not able to accurately assess where children are, it will be difficult to find out what progress they are making."

## Pioneer will be sadly missed

*Nina Smith writes:* June Maelzer, who died on 5 January, was a remarkable woman, and a pioneer in the fight for severely disabled people to be allowed to live independently.

In 1976, she gave birth to a son, Frank, despite the opposition of some in the medical and social care professions.

She proved them all wrong and brought up her son, with support, becoming one of the first people in the country to use direct payments to buy her own care.

She had a degree in psycholo-



gy and her services to psychology and disability rights were recognised in 1998 with an honorary masters from Manchester Metropolitan University.

Her campaigning work ranged from the battle for

accessible public transport in Manchester in the early 1980s to the Disabled People's Direct Action Network's accessible housing demo last year.

She also campaigned with Adapt and the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

Last May, she moved to Cornwall so she could spend her retirement in a beautiful place. Sadly, that retirement was all too brief.

Although it was always a struggle, she never stopped fighting for her rights.

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### In brief

#### Warr to Guide Dogs

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has appointed a director of fellow disability charity Scope as its new chief executive.

Bridget Warr, who is not disabled, will take over the post in April.

Chairman Barry Weatherill said: "The appointment comes as we complete the task of moving to a more flexible, community-based delivery of services."

#### New guide for cabs

A new good practice guide for minicab drivers should improve transport services for disabled people, according to government advisers.

The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee published the guide as a new act comes into force making it illegal for private hire drivers and operators to refuse to carry guide and assistance dogs.



DN CAMPAIGN



# Abuse still rife

Over one in five disabled bays are being abused by non-disabled drivers, despite supermarket efforts to tackle the issue, the 2004 Baywatch survey shows.

The survey was carried out in January in more than 800 car parks belonging to ASDA, Safeway, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

It showed that, over the past year, the proportion of bays being "abused" rose from 18.5 to 21 per cent, with disabled shoppers unable to park in an allocated disabled parking bay at 37 per cent of stores.

Safeway shoppers had the

worst experiences, with over half of their stores not having a free disabled space.

The survey shows that, despite top level commitment from the supermarkets, store managers are not doing enough to prevent abuse.

The Baywatch campaign has launched a competition\* to highlight best and worst supermarkets and the best store employee in relation to disabled parking.

Mary Wilkinson, DN editor, said the results were "shocking".

Ed Passant, chief executive of

the Disabled Drivers' Motor club said: "Despite all the efforts of the campaign, there remains a fundamental problem at local level which needs to be tackled now."

An ASDA spokesman said they were "very committed" to the campaign but admitted it was a "constant battle".

A Sainsbury's spokeswoman said: "We will continue to raise customer awareness on this important issue."

\* Nomination forms are at [www.baywatchcampaign.org](http://www.baywatchcampaign.org) and at the Big Four supermarkets

## Royal Mail quizzed over post opening

A leading UK charity has called an emergency meeting with the Royal Mail to discuss the free postal service for blind people.

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) requested a meeting after receiving six complaints that mail sent under the Articles for the Blind service (AB) had been opened and the

recipients unfairly charged.

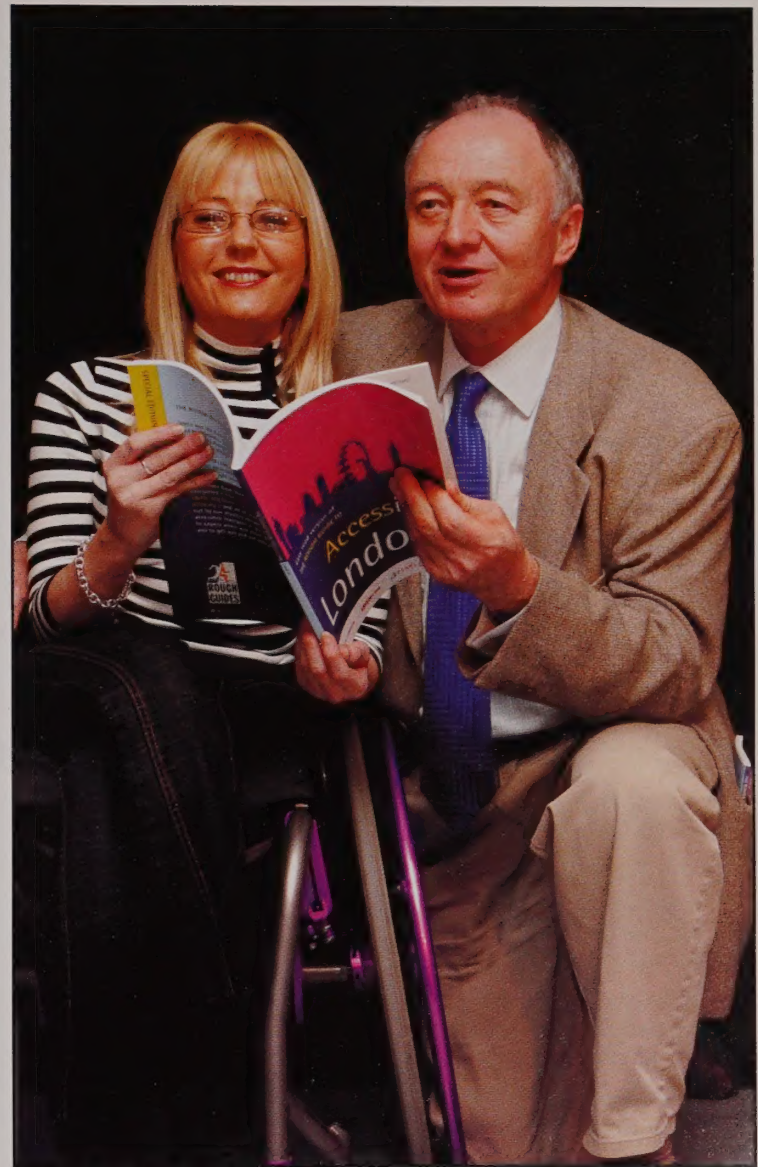
DN reader Katie Brooks said her husband's mail had been opened, written on, and the Articles for the Blind label crossed out. He was left with a £1.56 charge.

"There are probably a lot of blind people who don't even know their mail is being

opened," she said.

A Royal Mail spokeswoman said one of the requirements of AB is that the mail must be sent unsealed, so it can be inspected.

But an RNIB spokesman said they were not aware of these conditions and the charity wanted Royal Mail to tell them the scheme's guidelines.



Open book: London Mayor Ken Livingstone and actress Julie Fernandez have launched a new guide\* to 50 of the capital's favourite accessible venues. \*The Rough Guide to Accessing London is free, and available in alternative formats, from tel 020 7222 1234, telephone 020 7918 3015 or fax 020 7941 4678

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# Campaigners rally mayors in waiting

Campaigners are hoping their manifesto will help to put disabled people's rights at the top of the agenda for candidates in this June's London elections.

Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD) is asking candidates to sign up to its Disabled People's Manifesto and its Nothing About Us Without Us campaign to involve disabled people in political decision-making. The manifesto focuses on areas the Mayor can control and influence.

It includes demands for a respect for the human rights of disabled people; the right to safe, accessible, affordable transport; equal job opportunities for disabled Londoners; and for independent living to be the basis of the Mayor's housing policies.

Ruth Bashall, an independent consultant for GLAD, said: "We want to get away from the traditional view that disabled people only ever want to talk



about access and transport."

On 10 June, voters in London will elect a new Mayor as well as MEPs and members of the Greater London Assembly.

Mayoral candidates include the Mayor, Ken Livingstone, for Labour, Simon Hughes for the Liberal Democrats (above), Conservative Steven Norris and Darren Johnson for the Green Party.

A final consultation conference for disabled people to discuss the draft manifesto will take place on 26 February at GLAD's offices at 336 Brixton Road.

## DN CAMPAIGN

# Mixed signals

## One man cleared of supplying drug

REPORTS BY LUCY GLYNN

A man who admitted giving free cannabis to disabled people has been cleared of intending to supply the drug.

Jeff Ditchfield, from Rhyl, North Wales, runs a shop selling cannabis paraphernalia.

Glyn Williams, from Caerwys, who has MS and has received cannabis from Mr Ditchfield, told Chester Crown Court in January that it reduces his pain more than any prescribed drug.

The jury found Mr Ditchfield not guilty, but the judge warned he could be prosecuted again if he continues to supply the drug.

Mr Ditchfield said afterwards: "The jury understand I do it for sick people. It restored my faith in society. There are so many people relying on me for help. I get

### Cannabis reclassification – what it means



- Both medicinal and recreational cannabis use are still illegal, but people found with a small amount are likely to be given a warning and have their cannabis confiscated. The government has not said what constitutes a "small amount".

- Repeat offenders and people smoking cannabis near children are more likely to be arrested but whether they are or not depends on the individual police officer. Medicinal use might be taken into account.

- The Association of Chief Police Officers expects a number of test cases will be brought against the police for unfair arrest. The outcome of these should help clarify the law.

- Cannabis dealing still carries a maximum 14 year prison sentence.

new people calling every day."

A Legalise Cannabis Alliance spokesman said the case set "a legal precedent", but a Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) spokeswoman said: "This changes nothing for the CPS, but it may affect a judge's decision. If something is against the law, it

remains against the law."

The case came as cannabis was downgraded from a class B to class C drug, although it remains illegal.

Meanwhile, GW Pharmaceuticals has said it expects its cannabis spray to be licensed by the government's drug regulatory agency in June.

## Another complains at jail treatment

A disabled man jailed for cannabis offences claims he has been "brutally" treated by the Prison Service.

Chris Baldwin, who has spastic paraplegia, was sentenced in January to six months in prison, after pleading guilty to offences connected with running a cannabis café in Worthing.

Writing from prison, Mr Baldwin has told how he was moved to an open prison in a "sweat box" van, which caused stiffness in his legs and worsened his condition.

He only stayed at Ford Open Prison, in West Sussex, for a few hours because the prison is spread over a large site, making it unsuitable for someone who walks with crutches.



Mr Baldwin outside Chichester Crown Court in January

Mr Baldwin was also told he couldn't have an accessible cell and would have to share a room. He also had to walk 20 yards to the nearest toilet.

He was then moved back to High Down Prison in Surrey by taxi.

He said: "I feel as though I am being punished because I am disabled. In three weeks, I will probably be eligible for release on tag. So why did they bother to move me?"

Don Barnard, spokesman for the Legalise Cannabis Alliance, said Mr Baldwin's treatment was "disgusting".

"A few moments planning and a little communication could easily have prevented it."

A Prison Service spokeswoman said every effort was made to cater for disabled prisoners. "Any allegations of mistreatment are taken very seriously and enquiries will be made into the concerns raised by Mr Baldwin."



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## DN CAMPAIGN



# Air we go!

Airlines in the UK have given a general commitment to the government's code of practice to improve air travel for disabled people, but the complicated nature of the airline industry could undermine the code's success.

The code was published in March 2003 to make air travel more user-friendly for disabled people and sets minimum standards for accessible travel. It applies to UK airports and covers the check-in process, from car parking to boarding.

The government has now appointed research company TRL to find out how far airlines are abiding by the code.

Over the next year, the company will question airlines and passengers and carry out mystery shopping as well as audits of airports and aircraft.

But while British Airways, BMI, EasyJet, Excel Airlines, FlyBE, Mytravel and Virgin Atlantic told *DN* they supported the code, they do not have to physically sign up and so do not have specific targets to meet. Ryanair is not covered by the code as it is based in Ireland.

It is also unclear who has responsibility for passengers and luggage at different times. This changes between airport, airline and ground handling

staff and can vary between airports.

An EasyJet spokeswoman said that while they aim to meet the code's recommendations they can only do this for the part of the journey they control. "Although we work with the airports and ground handling companies, we are unable to make guarantees about the service they offer," she said.

TRL project manager Lorna Pearce said: "One of the problems we are battling with is trying to find out who is responsible for what and how many different companies are involved."

## Charges dropped

A landmark case against budget airline Ryanair means disabled people should no longer be charged for wheelchair assistance at airports.

Central London County Court ruled the airline discriminated against disabled passenger Bob Ross after he had to pay £18 for a wheelchair to get him from check-in to his plane at Stansted, and ordered it to pay £1,300 compensation.

Mr Ross, from London, who uses a wheelchair for long distances, said: "The decision is great news, not just for me, but for many other disabled people. It was blatantly unfair that I should pay more to fly simply because of my disability. Ryanair were operating a two-tier fares system – a cheap deal for non disabled passengers but a raw deal for disabled travellers."

Ryanair is appealing against the decision and has slapped a



"Blatantly unfair": Mr Ross slams the airline after the judgement

50p levy on all tickets to pay for the provision of wheelchairs.

But the Disability Rights Commission, which took Mr Ross's case, said the cost could be met for less than 2p per passenger. Chairman Bert Massie said: "I hope Ryanair will ensure that wheelchairs are now provided free to disabled people, just as other airlines do."

"It beggars belief that a

company with £165.23 million annual profits last year should quibble over meeting the cost of providing disabled people with a wheelchair."

Ryanair said BAA Stansted should be responsible for providing assistance in its terminal buildings. A spokesman said the ruling was "defective" and left them with no alternative but to impose the 50p levy.

## Voting should get easier

New guidelines should make it easier for disabled people to vote, according to a disability charity.

The new guidance\* from the Electoral Commission aims to help those who run elections improve access to polling stations, election literature, poll cards and electoral registration forms. It follows a review of access at last year's elections.

Examples of good practice featured in the guidance

include training for staff, publicity campaigns, low level polling booths and accessible information leaflets.

After the last General Election, the Polls Apart campaign, headed by Scope, Capability Scotland and the Disability Rights Commission, showed almost seven in ten polling stations had access problems.

A Scope spokesman said the new guidelines were "a positive

step forward", but said that "as they only cover polling stations they will need to develop as new methods of voting come in."

The Electoral Commission also made recommendations for changes to the law. These included election returning officers to be given powers to use all accessible publicly owned buildings as polling stations and for officers to review access at all polling stations every four years.

\*[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

### In brief

#### Direct payments

Disabled people can use their direct payments to pay close relatives who don't live with them for care services, the government has confirmed.

Community care minister Stephen Ladyman said some councils had been confused about the rules. In exceptional

circumstances, direct payments can also be used to pay relatives who live with the recipients.

#### Moving out – not on

A study\* of women with severe learning difficulties who moved out of a long-stay hospital into the community concluded that the change was usually a "largely negative experience".

\* [judith.trust@lineone.net](mailto:judith.trust@lineone.net)



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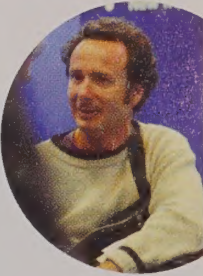
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DN



## Letter from Brussels

Richard Howitt 



New proposals will call on European countries to report their progress in integrating disabled people

The European Year of Disabled People has ended. Now the European Parliament will debate plans for the follow-up.

In November, at the European Parliament of Disabled People, disabled representatives from across Europe explained how they should be better served in future.

The draft report on this will be written by an Italian member of the Disability Intergroup (DI), who will listen closely to ideas from other members and disability groups.

The draft proposals will focus on implementing Europe's new Employment Directive and mainstreaming the disability agenda across all European Union (EU) policy areas, giving priority to employment access, lifelong learning and new technologies.

They will include an important new commitment: member states will be obliged to report on their achievements for the integration of disabled people every two years. Special attention will be paid to devel-

opments in new member states.

The reporting process will be a way for the Commission to compare and contrast the work of European countries. Disability organisations will have an important role.

While the Disability Intergroup welcomes many of the proposals, it believes the focus should be on promoting EU non-discrimination legislation and the mandated accessibility requirements across key areas like transport, information and the built environment.

It also believes that disability mainstreaming should get the same attention as gender mainstreaming in EU initiatives.

The European Parliament supports the campaign for a Disability Specific Directive and is disappointed that the Commission does not have this as a goal.

DI will be stressing the need for member states, including the British Government, to fully consult disability organisations when they are preparing the two-yearly reports and monitoring progress.

Richard Howitt MEP is chair of the European Parliament All-Party Disability Intergroup, e-mail: [ep@edf-feph.org](mailto:ep@edf-feph.org)

# Arthritis anger

Volunteers at branches of Arthritis Care are "angry, frustrated and insulted" by a new strategy that will force many of them to leave the charity.

Arthritis Care (AC) has told its more than 500 UK branches that only those active in campaigning, fundraising and providing information to people with arthritis can remain in the charity as new "charter" groups.

Other less active branches will have to leave, although they will be able to affiliate themselves to the charity, with the possibility of some initial funding.

It follows AC's announcement late last year that it was making up to 15 managers redundant as part of cost-cutting measures (*DN January 2004*).

Many branch members\* feel that people with arthritis, who benefit from the events, help and support they provide, will suffer from the shake-up in the charity's structure.

They have also criticised the charity for proposing to destroy its own "grass roots".

Pauline Coates, chairman of AC's North-West area liaison committee, said: "I feel angry, frustrated and insulted. A lot of us will try and go on our own."

Our members can't be let down." She said that as many as three-quarters of branches may leave.

Kieran Kettleton, the charity's director of marketing and fundraising, said AC had had to make "painful decisions".

"We believe that this strategy will have the greatest benefit for people with arthritis, given that we have limited resources and cannot meet personally and individually the needs of every person with arthritis."

"Branches are a net cost to the organisation and have been for a number of years."

\*[www.cookham.com/ac](http://www.cookham.com/ac)

## Game on

A review of play facilities in England has urged the government to put millions of pounds of lottery money into play opportunities for disabled children.

The review\*, set up to advise the government on how it should spend a £200m cheque earmarked for play provision, recommends a "major emphasis on the inclusion of disabled children and young people".

Disabled children's charity KIDS welcomed the recommendations but called for funds to be put aside for inclusive play work in every region.

\**Getting Serious About Play*, at [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)



Driving seat: junior transport minister Tony McNulty MP was at his department's own mobility centre in Crowthorne in January to launch a new Static Assessment Rig. The machine, developed by Motability and the Forum of Mobility Centres, finds the right vehicle adaptations for disabled drivers.

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**AUTOCHAIR**

## Bard luck for poets

Three disabled poets have won prizes in a competition run as part of the European Year of Disabled People.

"Disabled? Poet?", run by Transport for London (TfL), invited disabled Londoners to write a poem using "journey" as the theme.

The adult winners were Evelyn McNally for "Green Light", and Anna Losinski for "Down in Warsaw". Amanda Sargeant won the children's category with "The Journey".

The awards ceremony was hosted by poet Roger McGough.

The winning poems will be displayed on London's buses and tubes, following the successful "Poems on the Underground" scheme.

\*The poems can also be seen at [www.tfl.gov.uk/eydp](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/eydp) or from Amanda Brooks at TfL, tel 020 7941 4882 or email [amandabrooks@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:amandabrooks@tfl.gov.uk)



# News Review

**A monthly round-up of news from the mainstream media**

## Genetics storm

A government genetics adviser caused outrage after he was reported to have said it might be acceptable to kill severely disabled newborn babies.

Professor John Harris, a member of the Human Genetics Commission, was alleged to have said during a debate organised by a Commons committee that he saw no difference between killing disabled babies and aborting 40-week-old disabled foetuses.

But Prof Harris said later he "neither proposed, promoted nor recommended infanticide nor any change in the existing law on infanticide" and does not think "any individual's moral status is altered by the presence or absence of disabilities".

## Plane wrong

Eleven deaf people were thrown off a flight from Liverpool to Amsterdam, when the captain of the plane decided that they were a safety risk.

The budget airline easyJet apologised for last October's incident and said that the captain had made the wrong decision. The passengers were found seats on the following flight and are now seeking compensation.

## Wanted: social workers

The government launched a £4 million campaign to encourage more people to become social care workers\*.

The campaign, aimed at people looking for flexible work or career changes, will include adverts on the side of milk cartons. Vacancy rates for social care workers are currently running at about 8-10 per cent.

\*[www.socialcarecareers.co.uk](http://www.socialcarecareers.co.uk) or tel. 0845 6046404

## Advert changed

A benefits consultancy was told to change an advert which said people with conditions including arthritis, dizziness and breathlessness should be able to claim more than £180 a week in benefits or pensions.

The Advertising Standards Authority had upheld a complaint against the Steve de Bondt Benefits Consultancy.



Challenge: (from left) Fiona Lewis, Grant Harman and Thomas Beddow from Kingsdown School during last year's final

# Kielder expands

A competition that brings together disabled and non-disabled young people has been expanded to allow even more disabled youngsters to take part.

The Kielder Challenge features teams of eight 13 to 16 year-olds, four of whom are disabled, battling against the clock to solve problems in an outdoor environment.

This year there are two categories, to allow those with learning and sensory impairments, as well as those with physical disabilities, to take part.

The final will take place in Kielder Forest in Northumberland in September, following regional heats in April or May.

[www.fieldfare.org.uk](http://www.fieldfare.org.uk)

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- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (which must include constant attendance allowance)
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- Disabled Person's Tax Credit
- Pension Credit
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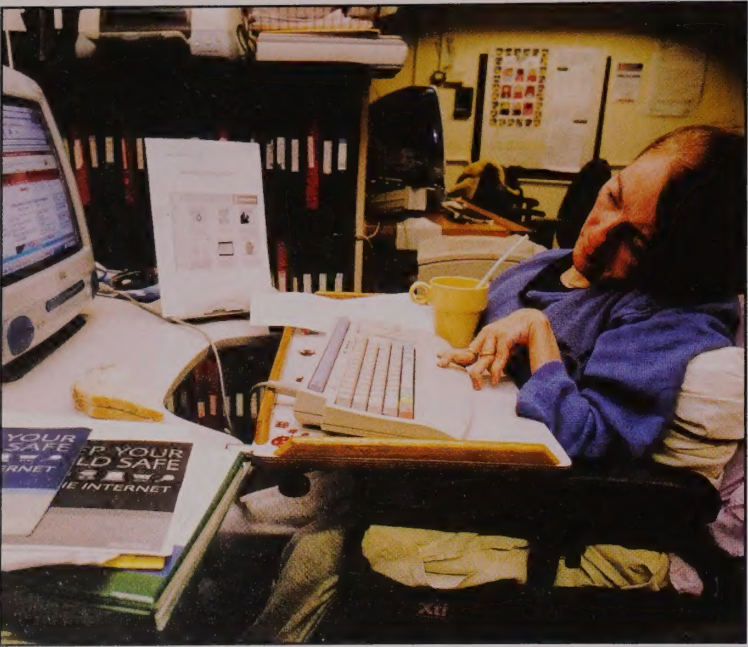
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Easy reader: Hazel Shepherd was one of the disabled Brent residents who helped the council launch a campaign to encourage visitors to its web-site\*. It includes access information on all council buildings, text-only versions of web pages and speech software. The campaign was launched at a council-run computer training room for disabled people. \*[www.brent.gov.uk](http://www.brent.gov.uk)

## Show us your badge

New powers for Scottish police officers, traffic wardens and council parking attendants to inspect Blue Badges should help disabled drivers, according to a transport advisory body.

The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) said the new law should help clamp down on the abuse of the scheme by non-disabled relatives and friends of badge holders, as well as forging and tampering with badges.

Margaret Hickish, convener of MACS, said: "Legitimate

badge holders have nothing to fear from their badges being inspected. It is about catching people using a badge that is not theirs or who are using a forged or stolen badge."

The government promised to bring in similar powers for England and Wales as part of its response to the Blue Badge review in December 2002.

But a Department for Transport spokesman said it was still waiting for a suitable bill in which to include such powers.

# Advocacy access

Many groups of disabled people have "very limited" access to independent advocacy, according to a new survey.

The research\* by the Independent Advocacy Campaign (IAC) found those with physical, sensory, communication and profound and multiple impairments were less likely to have access to an advocate than other disabled people.

Less than one in three of the 155 advocacy organisations which took part in the survey said they provided regular assistance to adults with communi-

cation impairments, and only 36 per cent regularly worked with adults with profound and multiple impairments.

The poor provision was mainly due to a lack of funding and specialist skills and experience, the survey found.

The IAC called for action from local and national government, health bodies, advocacy schemes and service providers.

The campaign took its findings to last month's meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Disability Group.

Caroline Clipson, co-author

of the report and a research and policy officer for Scope, an IAC member, said after the meeting: "There is an understanding in government that advocacy is very useful and helpful for disabled people, but there hasn't really been much action in terms of funding that."

So far, 48 MPs have signed an early day motion supporting the report's conclusions.

The IAC is also hoping to meet community care minister Stephen Ladyman MP.

\**Advocating for Equality*, [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

## In brief

### One in five harassed

One in five disabled people in Scotland has been harassed because of his or her disability, according to a DRC survey.

The figures were revealed after the launch of a consultation paper to look at how the Scottish law on hate crime could be improved.

### New CEO for Kidz

Disabled businesswoman Ruth Owen, a wheelchair user, has taken over as the new chief executive of Whizz-Kidz, the children's mobility charity.

## New life support

A new umbrella organisation aims to promote better lifestyles for people with learning difficulties.

The Association for Supported Living (ASL) will be formally launched at a conference\* in Manchester on 18 March.

It has been founded by seven UK organisations that provide supported living, and aims to "promote the independence, inclusion, choices and rights" of people with learning difficulties.

Steven Rose, chief executive of Choice Support, one of the founders, said ASL had built up an "enormous head of steam", with the launch conference expected to be a sell-out.

He said: "We are moving through a time of very rapid change in social policy... and somebody needs to be there at a national level, representing views of organisations like us."

Lord Victor Adebawale, chief executive of Turning Point, added: "The launch of the ASL is an exciting and much needed development coming at a critical time."

Founder organisations are Mencap, Turning Point, Choice Support, Renaissance Housing, Alternative Futures, The Brothers of Charity and Care UK.

\*Contact Michelle Bulley, tel 01273 623222x235 or email [michelleb@pavpub.com](mailto:michelleb@pavpub.com)



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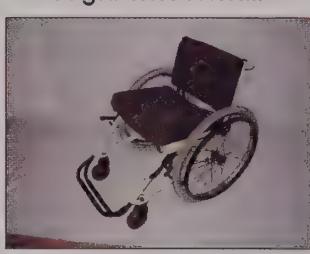
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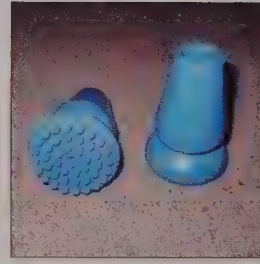
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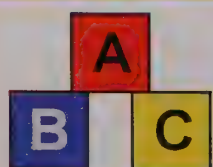
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**Motability**



# ME services under attack

The government's new programme of support services for ME has come under fire from a leading charity.

Twelve new specialist centres and 28 local support teams are being set up across England with a £8.5m cash injection.

But the ME Association questioned the treatments being offered in the centres.

Trustee Dr Charles Shepherd said: "While this initiative is welcome, there is a suspicion that some of these new services may end up offering no other choice than cognitive behaviour therapy and/or a graded exercise regime – two controversial

forms of management.

"The situation regarding a lack of any clear encouragement to researchers to pursue the underlying physical cause of ME/CFS remains indefensible."

But in a Lords debate, health minister Lord Warner defended the government's record on supporting research into the causes of ME, saying it had asked the Medical Research Council to develop a strategy for advancing research on the condition.

He said the government was "committed to independent research of this condition and

to obtaining the best possible evidence base for the way in which it is treated".

Lord Warner also rebuffed calls to withdraw current advice on ME, which lists it as a mental disorder. But he said the government "fully endorse" the view of an independent working group that ME is "a chronic illness".

Meanwhile, fellow ME charity, Action for ME, has been criticised by its members for a lack of transparency and accountability.

The charity said it would be considering increased transparency as part of a review of its governance.

## Youth sex programme launched

A pioneering sexual health programme is being launched for youngsters with autistic spectrum disorders in Scotland.

The National Autistic Society, which is running the programme with sexual health charity Caledonia Youth, says young people with Asperger syndrome and other conditions are often not catered for in mainstream sex education.

Dawn Larman, the charity's

national officer, said: "The core of sexual health is based on interaction and communication, but the social problems which occur with autism mean that this is an area which can be much harder for these children."

The programme involves discussions in small groups about self-esteem, boundaries of relationships, communication skills, contraception, sexual

behaviour and health.

It is aimed at young people aged 13 to 25 who live within travelling distance of Glasgow, and will run for ten weeks.

It may also be expanded if successful.

For more information, call the National Autistic Society on 0141 221 8090

## Slower progress

MS SOCIETY



"Promising": progress of ms may be slower than originally thought

Multiple sclerosis may not be as progressive a condition as once thought, according to a new study.

Research published in the journal *Neurology* found that of 99 patients who were walking unassisted in 1991, 71 were still able to do so in 2001.

The Mayo Clinic in Minnesota found only 20 per cent of patients who did not require a wheelchair in 1991

needed one ten years later.

But the MS Society suggested the study was not long enough to reveal the potential effects of the condition.

Alison Handford, researcher at the MS Society, said: "This study is promising for people with minimal disability but it appears that once a certain stage is reached, disability continues to progress. Ten years is not that long in terms of MS."

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# Home alone

Vulnerable people in care homes are being abandoned for years at a time. Ignored by social workers, they are at risk of emotional and sexual abuse. John Pring investigates



Long stay: Care home residents can go for years without receiving visits from social workers

After Alan was dumped at a Northamptonshire care home by Essex social services, he didn't receive a single visit from a social worker in 12 years. He was eventually discovered in a locked room, unwashed and semi-naked, lying curled up on a plastic chair. There was a pool of urine on the floor. A tribunal said the conditions in which he was found were an "affront to human dignity".

Alan's was not an isolated case. Thousands of adults with learning difficulties have been placed in residential care far from their original homes and never have their cases reviewed.

Social workers used to call it "planned neglect": they knew they ought to do something about these "out of county" placements, but they were constantly shoved to the bottom of the pile because of a lack of resources. In Lincolnshire, for example, 570 people have been placed in residential care by local authorities outside the county. Many were placed there by London boroughs, which have failed to visit them to check on their welfare.

Mary Quint, clinical service manager for the Lincolnshire Partnership Trust, says many of these people are at risk of abuse. "There are places in Lincolnshire we would not place people in," she says.

"They are placed in them by other authorities and we are having to pick up the adult abuse investigations.

"It is neglectful for other authorities to dump people into Lincolnshire without talking to us."

Steven Rose, chief executive of Choice Support, which provides supported living and residential care to people with learning difficulties, agrees.

"In my experience, local authorities' supervision and follow-up of placements after they have made them are absolutely abysmal," he says.

The London boroughs are the worst offenders. He estimates that most have about 100 people each in out-of-area placements. "Even in their own borough, they rarely get round them once a year. I know they do not get to the ones that are miles away. They just haven't got the resources."

His organisation is

responsible for about 60 people in one county, and he believes none of them receive visits from care managers. "Our organisation isn't really any different to many others," he says. "We know that any vulnerable person is more likely to be financially, emotionally, physically or sexually abused. We know there is a high incidence of it in terms of people with learning difficulties, not just by the staff, but also by other people living with them.

"The care manager, through regular visiting, isn't necessarily going to detect any sort of abuse, but what they can do is satisfy themselves that

The confusion over who was responsible for these clients, once they were found placements, led to many simply being abandoned.

Dorothy was one of them. She arrived at Longcare in late 1983 from Botley's Park Hospital. Six months later, she was officially discharged from the hospital. For the next five years, she didn't receive a single visit from a social worker.

The regional health authority for Botley's Park, South-West Thames, continued to pay her bills, but none of its staff visited Dorothy to check on her. She was only visited by a social worker after her sister expressed

abandoned by their paying authority."

Kent County Council has just begun an 18-month project to try to understand how out-of-county placements affect local services and people with learning difficulties and their families. Clare Skidmore\*\*, manager of the "Placed in Kent" project, says there are about 1,500 such people living in Kent residential homes. "In many – if not most – cases, these individuals' placements will not be reviewed for years at a time," she says.

The project will include research in partnership with the Tizard Centre at the University of Kent and a major conference later this year, backed by the Department of Health (DOH).

A DOH spokeswoman says it is aware that out-of-county placements are a "significant problem". She says the *Valuing People*\*\*\* white paper stresses the importance of helping people with learning difficulties exercise greater choice and control over where and how they live.

The DOH is also trying to "improve the quality of commissioning and care management in learning disability services", through the Valuing People Support Team.

But she stresses that councils have a legal responsibility for people they place in residential accommodation, both in and outside their own area.

Hopefully, the Kent project and the ongoing work by the Valuing People team will lead to fewer vulnerable adults being abandoned in substandard accommodation many miles from their family and friends.

*\*Silent Victims, John Pring's book about Longcare and the abuse of adults with learning difficulties, is published by Gibson Square Books*

*\*\*Tel. 01622 696374 or email clare.skidmore@kent.gov.uk*

*\*\*\*www.doh.gov.uk/vpst/papers*

## 'Why are we still sending people miles and miles away from where they know other people?'

there are adequate systems and safeguards in place."

Many of those abused at the Longcare homes\* in Buckinghamshire had not been visited by a social worker for years. The problem was particularly acute with former patients of long-stay hospitals, many of whom moved to Longcare in the early 1980s.

concern about Longcare.

The council inspectors who investigated the Longcare regime later uncovered a "catalogue of abuse" at the homes and concluded that the residents, including Dorothy, had been subjected to years of "humiliation, deprivation, torment and punishment".

But even if "out of county" residents are visited by a social worker, how helpful will that be? Not very, according to Dr Jean Collins, director of the charity Values Into Action.

"What can anybody pick up when they visit someone once a year in terms of how the home is run and how satisfactory that person is in living in that home?" she says.

She believes people have the right to live in their home area. "Why are we still sending people miles and miles away from where they know other people? It is just absurd; deliberately sending vulnerable people into situations where they are going to be even more vulnerable. Wherever I go in the country, people talk to me about it being a problem. They are concerned people are being

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**Happy Birthday DN**



# Fund warning

Cash boost needed if athletes are to compete internationally

Learning disabled people will be excluded from international competitions unless the government increases sports funding, a leading sports body has warned.

Nick Parr, chief executive of the English Sports Association for People with a Learning Disability (*right*), has called for disability sports funding to be reviewed and said that, without a funding increase, disabled athletes won't reach their potential.

"A new project for getting young disabled people into



sport seems to appear every week, but without the support of the national disability organisations there would be few opportunities to compete beyond county or regional level," he said.

"How sad it would be if London were to be hosting the Paralympics, yet we had hardly any disabled athletes to cheer on."

The funding concerns follow those made by Disability Sport England late last year (*DN January 2004*).

A Sport England spokeswoman said there were no immediate plans to change the way disability sport was funded, but they were looking at how all sports were run in the UK and would report later this year.



## Footie teams told: 'Stay at home'

There will be no footballers from Great Britain competing in this summer's Paralympic Games, the British Paralympic Association (BPA) has ruled.

The announcement comes as a surprise to two of England's disability football teams who qualified for the games last year.

The BPA has said that although England's blind and cerebral palsy teams "technically qualified" for the games, they

did not fulfil BPA criteria because players were selected only from England and not the whole of Great Britain.

Football currently operates with separate teams from England, Wales and Scotland, with the English FA fielding the most skilled disability teams.

A BPA spokeswoman said the FA was told the rules two years ago and shouldn't have been surprised an England

team would not be allowed to go to Athens. "They need to set up a proper structure allowing athletes from all of the nations to play together," she said.

A spokesman for the FA said the footballers were "disappointed". "We were going to use this year's World Championships in Argentina as a warm up for the Paralympics. Now we will have to make that the tournament for the blind team this year."

## On the ball

A partially-sighted footballer has been tipped as a future England star after he was spotted at a football festival for Manchester schoolchildren.

The week, organised by the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) and Manchester County Football Association, was part of Seeing is Believing, a project to increase opportunities for blind and partially-sighted children to play football.

Graham Keeley, manager of

the England blind squad, was so impressed with Darlene Tchoue (*above*) that he invited him to attend an England training weekend.

Tchoue said being asked to play for England would be "like a dream".

Keeley said: "Darlene looked like a long distance runner in training. I think that he has every chance of making it into the team in the next couple of years."

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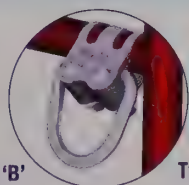
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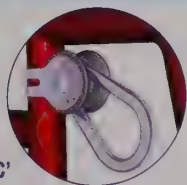
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# Rave new world

Fed up with a club culture that didn't cater for deaf people, DJ Troi Lee launched his own night – and started a new phenomena in the process. David Felton reports

In the thirty minutes I have with Troi Lee, his phone is rarely quiet. On the line are a string of DJs, venue managers and club promoters. Over the coming weeks, these phone calls will be a constant, Lee says. For in April he is throwing one of the biggest parties for deaf people London will have ever seen: the Deaf Rave Easter party.

The 29-year-old DJ and club organiser grew up with his twin brother in London's East End. Profoundly deaf, he attended mainstream schools with specialist units, first in Islington, then in Camden. But mainstream education didn't work for Lee.

"I was learning nothing in Camden. I would sit in class with 30 others, but could never hear above the background noise – I couldn't hear to learn. In the end, mum wrote to the council asking for me to be moved elsewhere."

Lee was lucky. He got a place at Ovingdean Hall boarding school for deaf pupils in Brighton. "The staff were trained and knew exactly what they were doing. It changed my life, literally. I rediscovered myself and education. If I

hadn't gone there, I might have ended up on the streets."

If his time at Ovingdean had nurtured his confidence, the next few years did the opposite. Lee refers to his time at college in Kings Cross as "messed up". Then, after training in computer programming, he ended up working in a warehouse. "I was bored, getting nowhere," he says.

His disillusionment with



working life continued when he became a manager at a cutlery firm in Brent Cross. "I had my own office. But it was like being in a box. They shut you away and forget about you. I think a lot of deaf people get that treatment. When I quit, after five years, I promised myself I'd never work in an office again."

That was six months ago. Since then, things have changed immeasurably. Now the East

Ender is surfing the wave of a new global phenomena – deaf raving.

Lee had been raving with hearing friends since school days, but it was a house party that sowed the Deaf Rave seeds.

"Four deaf girls were having a leaving party, so we gave them a real send-off. We borrowed big bass cone speakers from my cousin and I DJ'd. The whole house shook. It was the first time I'd played to a crowd, and it was unbelievable."

After that first night, Lee was asked time and again by friends when the next party would be. Now unemployed and living on benefits, he used his time to develop a new idea for a nightclub: a rave specifically for deaf people.

Finding a venue for that first night caused the most frustration. "I rang up loads of venues, but they just wouldn't open their doors. They didn't seem interested in deaf people."

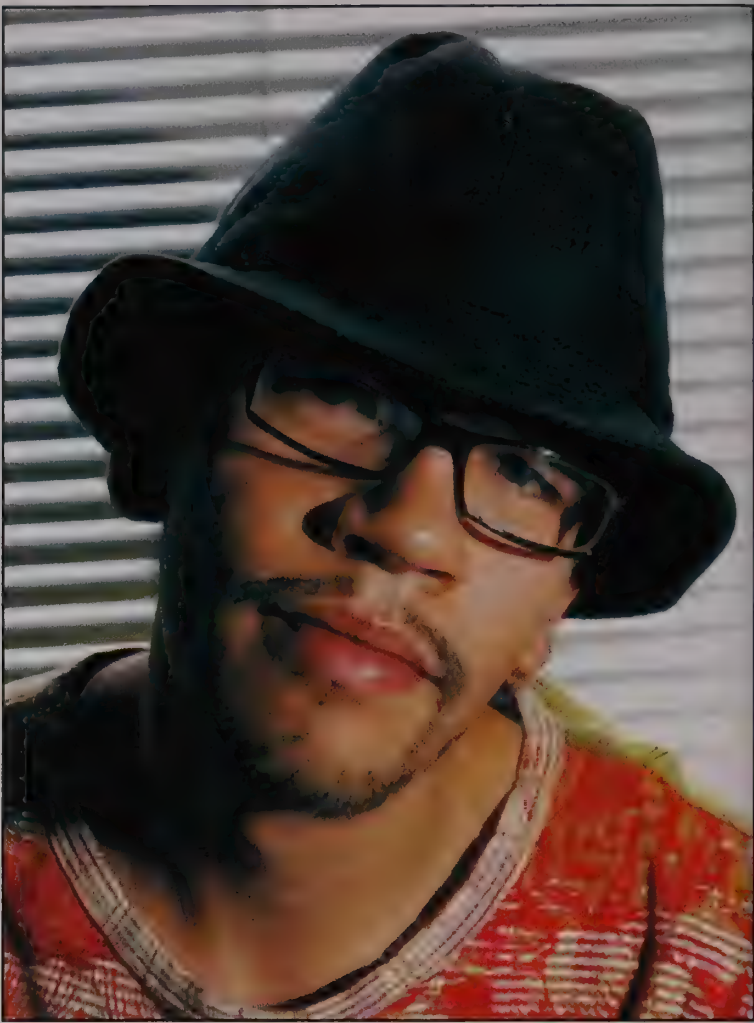
It was the kind of discrimination Lee had seen in clubland before. "There's a stigma about being deaf and going clubbing. Between deaf and hearing people, there's often an inability to understand and to be understood. It's particularly true in nightclubs."

In the end, Lee was offered a venue at International Student House, and on 3 May, 2003, 700 deaf people, friends and supporters came together to talk, drink and dance. "It was a rare night for the deaf community to get together. Some of the people hadn't seen each other for years. It was a joyous event."

The months of hard work paid off. "It showed deaf people could make their own entertainment."

The success of that first night led to more. The Deaf Rave's second outing was to the exclusive Glasshouse, on the Thames embankment, chosen for its "great sound system", which provides the low-end vibrations that deaf clubbers need. Next, and most recently, the rave descended on Boland House, where 650 clubbers – including deaf people from as far away as Australia and the States – saw in the New Year.

As the budget grows, swelled by rising visitor numbers, so the raves become slicker. The



From decks til dawn: New Year clubbers in London's Boland House

marketing devices for this unique nightclub involve heavy use of text messaging and email. The club's website receives thousands of visits a month, and a network of deaf friends (known as the Deaf Rave committee) ensure the word about the next event is passed around deaf networks in the UK and overseas.

Innovations to ease the club experience for clubbers and venue staff include a drinks menu on the bar that clubbers

"I know people who have been on the dole for 20 years. Job centres just sign people off week after week. It leads to physical and mental illness.

"These raves keep the community strong. They are about uniting. About being together. That's why I do them."

And there's more planned by the Deaf Rave team. The next event will feature comedy acts, dancers, sign language rapping – more visual elements than ever before. Lee also hopes that

bigger budgets will allow access to the kind of technology hearing ravers take for granted,

like lasers and projector screens.

But for the time being, DJ Troi Lee is just enjoying the ride. In the space of a year, he's packed in his demoralising office job to become one of the more surprising emerging stars of London clubland.

We part company in London's Holloway, just minutes away from the next venue Deaf Rave will take over. And as his phone rings again, I have no problem believing that it'll be the biggest yet.

• Deaf Rave Easter Show, 10 April, The Rocket, [www.deafrave.com](http://www.deafrave.com)

can point to when choosing drinks, and floor-mounted speakers to create those all-important vibrations.

In all this time, the motivation for Lee's work remains the same. He wants to give deaf people a good time; the kind of time that is just not available right now. On this subject he is passionate – even angry. "The number of clubs for deaf people in London has been cut time and again. If you're deaf in the capital now, there are only a couple of events you can attend. It means people become isolated."



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ILLUSTRATIONS: CLARE CURTIS

## Promoting promiscuity and unsafe sex

I am shocked and concerned to read Jo Williams bragging about her latest "shag" (*DN*, February). In her article she is promoting promiscuity and unsafe sex.

Is Jo unaware of the increasing prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases and infections? The "morning after pill" does not protect against these, nor will it prevent all pregnancies.

Jo really needs to take advice from the Family Planning Association or her local youth

advisory/enquiry service. From her article it sounds like alcohol could be a large part of her problem and Jo may need help with this?

I am concerned that *DN* printed this article. In doing so, it looks like you are applauding this behaviour while it is unsafe and irresponsible.

Naomi Fligg  
York

Arguing that you should not be discriminated against is one thing, but doing so by convey-

ing negative stereotypes of other people is unacceptable. It is also a contradiction of your basic case – that people should not be treated unfavourably because of some physical or mental characteristic.

I was surprised that *DN* published an article by Jo Williams in which she demonstrated her very negative views of old age. The phrase "the dour smell of age embalmed me" is particularly offensive.

Maria Brenton, email

## Third class citizens do feel 'touchy'

Never have I been so disgusted as I was to read the letter by Eunice Wilson, a self confessed disabled person, about Tony Blair talking of "the disabled".

The main reason a lot of disabled people are, as she describes, "touchy" and "offended" is because for so long we have been treated as third class citizens. Does she think the little help we have

managed to get over the years has just miraculously appeared? It is organisations like yours who have kept chipping away at governments to raise our standard of living and make more people disability aware.

Take your head out of the sand and get more involved and less critical of others.

TW Dwyer  
Barnstaple, Devon

## Milestone portrayal

Francesca Martinez, an actress with cp, played a leading role in *Doctors* (BBC, 6 January) – a very creditable performance.

*Doctors* tackles subjects affecting the human condition. As someone with life-long cp, I find it gratifying and encouraging that this disability has been dealt with in a mainstream TV drama series with sensitivity and realism. A milestone.

David Edwards  
Somerton, Somerset

## Help to keep young carers group going

I was stunned when I learned that our local young carers group has just lost its funding.

I sat wondering what I could do to help these special children who, from as young as seven years, help to care for their own family. They often

## Big thank you

It has been great fun putting this birthday issue together. Thank you to our contributors, and to all our very supportive advertisers for their good wishes - Editor

## Time the government woke up

*DN's* cannabis survey (January) provides overwhelming evidence that the government's continued failure to legalise the drug's use is denying its well-documented medicinal benefits to people with MS and others.

The survey should act as a timely wake-up call for the government, which is facing renewed criticism over the confusion caused by reclassifying cannabis as a class-C drug.

Current drug laws are forcing significant numbers of disabled people to visit dangerous areas and even gang houses in search of medical treatment, Green Party research has shown. Disabled people continue to risk arrest simply for trying to improve their quality of life.

I offer my full support to *DN's* campaign for the legalisation of cannabis. The decision about whether or not to medicate with cannabis should be taken following consultation between patient and doctor and the government must allow doctors to prescribe the drug when it is appropriate.

Jean Lambert MEP

Green Party, London

## Teen spirit



By Anthony Dale

It was an old barn, Grade II listed, that was falling down in our garden. In 2001 we won planning permission to convert it into a holiday home for disabled people.

We found some builders who were very good at this type of work. Even better, they lived in or near my village, Biddenden in Kent.

We started in March 2002. The tiles were stored and later put back on the roof, although we needed to buy 1,500 more which were missing or broken. All the old rotten wood was removed from the sides until only the frame was left.

The foundations were dug and filled with concrete. The whole frame was supported on scaffolding while the foundation wall was built.

My friend Dickie Mint, the carpenter, came and put big pieces of new wood on the wall. He then cut new mortice and tennon joints so the old wood could be joined into the new wood on the wall. Slowly he lowered the barn back down, so the whole frame fitted into the new wood. It was a slow process and took all day. And it all fitted together. Mr Mince (as I call him) shouted, "The Eagle has landed".

Over the year, the barn was worked on by Mr Mince, Steve the boss, Al, Trev, Dave the electrician and Ed the Plumber. Rob came and put the roof back on. My dad helped too and I kept an eye on them all. Mum made hundreds of cups of tea. She says it felt like 10,000.

There are no steps inside or outside the barn, so it is great for wheelchairs. Even the garden, patio and fishing deck are wheelchair friendly.

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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY DN!**

## back chat



● Malcolm Wicks, pensions minister in the Department for Worthless Promises (aka the Department for Work and Pensions), was on crusading form on a visit to his constituency in February.

The MP for Croydon North announced he wanted to find all the older people in the borough living in cold homes who had not yet claimed a government heating and insulation grant. "Together we can win this cold war," he declared.

Sadly, he seemed less concerned with rooting out all

the younger, severely disabled people also living in freezing Croydon homes.

Could this possibly be connected to his government's refusal to extend winter fuel payments to severely disabled people under the age of 60?

● And did you notice the offensive way in which our glorious tabloids reported that film legend Marlon Brando was...horror...seen using a wheelchair at the age of 80. "The wreck that is Brando at 80" (*Daily Mail*), "The SADFATHER" (*Daily Mirror*), with *The Sun* topping it off: "The Wheeled One". Nice. Very nice.



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# The write approach

 **DN's Hacked Off** survey found that a Cumbrian journalism course was one of Britain's most inclusive. Nuala Calvi learns what makes it so accessible

**D**N's survey of journalism colleges painted a bleak picture of the future for disabled journalists in Britain; a quarter had not accepted a single disabled student onto their courses in the last three years.

But one college that bucked the trend was Cumbria Institute of the Arts. With 12 per cent of students on its journalism course declaring a disability, the institute topped the table.

According to course leader Jackie Errigo, it's a standard other colleges could easily reach. Students are partly drawn to the college by its small, personal feel; smaller class sizes mean that teachers can offer more personal attention to every student, and are more likely to pick up any difficulties.

But, more importantly, the department has fostered a culture of awareness among its staff. "If I employ a new teacher, I make sure they are aware of our policies on disability at their induction," says Errigo.

"We have written a booklet for the intranet which everyone can access, explaining what

their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act actually mean in practice. And we're putting together a resource base in the library on different types of disability."

The college encourages students to declare any disability on their application to ensure their access needs can be met or whether, for example, a signer will be needed for their interview.

Students then have access to a strong support network throughout their course. The college's learning support team of one full-time and five part-time academic tutors exists alongside a counselling team of one full-time and one part-time student advisor. They work

**'If I employ a new teacher, I make sure they are aware of our policies on disability at their induction'**

closely with course staff to ensure the whole remit of support needs – from academic to welfare to practical – are met. This could involve helping with literacy or study skills, arranging for provision of specialist software, scribes,



Students at Cumbria Institute of the Arts

interpreters or mobility support workers.

"The team operates an appointments system, so students can arrange to see them whenever they need to after that. It's about the student being proactive as well as the

bureaucracy can be kept to a minimum.

Students receive help to claim their Disabled Students Allowance and the college meets the cost of assessments for it. This helps pay for the support needed at the college, although the institute also funds support from within its own budget.

Rachael\*, 18, who has an artificial leg, is in her first year of a journalism BA. Although she didn't reveal her disability on her application form, a talk given to all students on their arrival about the college's support services changed her mind. "I thought it would be wise so that if I was ever off for hospital appointments at least

the tutors would know why. They were very helpful and had a brilliant attitude. If I have to miss lectures, they make sure they copy all the notes for me."

When it comes to assessment, the college runs an extenuating circumstances procedure for any student who has had health or welfare problems which have affected their ability to do their work on time.

But Errigo also makes sure she is flexible: "If a student needs regular hospital treatment, we negotiate extended deadlines and alternative days for assessing them. And if we are doing an off-campus assignment, I discreetly check disabled students will have transport to get there."

So in a supportive atmosphere such as this, will students get a false sense of security about the tough world of journalism?

"My students are intelligent adults and know the reality is that a deadline is a deadline, but we take the view that journalism is a broad church and not every outlet is about hourly deadlines," says Errigo.

"There are other environments in which one can work – magazines have much longer deadlines and with online journalism you can put things on the web any time of the day or night.

"I'd never suggest every job is open to everybody – it isn't, regardless of whether they have a disability or not – and it would only be fair at interview stage to tell them to factor that into their decision. But you just have to think more laterally."

\* name has been changed

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# New man at the wheel

As a new director takes the driving seat at Motability, motoring correspondent Douglas Campbell reflects on the last eight years, and asks what's to come

**D**on Brereton stepped into the director's job at Motability on 1 January.

He comes from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), where he was director of the Disabilities and Carers Group. Before that, he was head of the Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit.

Don brings with him personal experience of disability as he has a son with Down's Syndrome and he is involved with a parents' organisation.

He says that he has been aware of the important work done by Motability through the close links between the charity and the government, but only now is he starting to understand the complex details of the scheme.

He welcomes the recent changes that mean Motability customers are not left without a vehicle when they come to renew; too often this happened when the new car was not ready for delivery.

Don has a hard act to follow. Noel Muddiman retired earlier this year after more than eight years as director. In that time he has overseen enormous changes at Motability.

In his early days, many representatives of disability organisations were in almost constant battle with Motability. Today there is a real sense of partnership.

Disabled people will be looking to Don to build on the recent changes that have made the scheme more user-friendly and better able to meet our needs. Because, advances aside, we still need more flexibility in the scheme.

## Advance rental (deposit) prices

	2003	2004
Nissan Micra automatic	£ 234	Nil
Vauxhall Corsa 3-door automatic	£ 299	Nil
Vauxhall Corsa 5-door automatic	£ 399	£ 99
Renault Clio 3-door automatic	£ 399	Nil
Volkswagen Lupo automatic	£ 610	£ 79
Nissan Almera 1.5	£ 203	Nil
Vauxhall Astra	£ 999	£ 750
Vauxhall Astra automatic	£ 649	Nil
Ford Focus 1.6 Zetec 3-door automatic	£ 650	Nil
Ford Focus 1.6 Zetec 5-door automatic	£ 850	Nil
Nissan Almera 1.8 3-door automatic	£ 1,541	Nil
Nissan Almera 1.8 5-door automatic	£ 2,019	Nil

**For new customers, the monthly Motability price list is a must. Not only does it show prices for a wide range of cars, but also comparative figures for fuel consumption**

He also needs to tackle his former colleagues in the DWP to increase the funds available to assist those disabled people who have the most complex and expensive mobility needs.

Meanwhile, prices on the Motability contract hire, or lease, scheme have fallen over the last year. The table above shows the comparative advance rental for equivalent vehicles in February each year. In some cases the vehicle specification has also improved. With prices like these, shopping around has to be the order of the day.

For new customers, the monthly Motability price list is a must. Not only does it show prices for a wide range of cars,

but it also provides comparative figures for fuel consumption.

For renewing customers, the natural course of action is often to go for the same car again. While this may be an easy option, with constantly changing prices what was good value three years ago may be less so today.

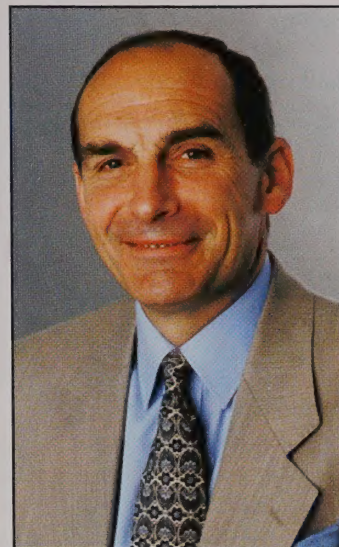
Motability prices sometimes show that cars which would normally be dearer to buy are

the less expensive option when obtained through the Motability scheme. This can be because the discounts Motability receives vary from manufacturer to manufacturer and from month to month. It can also be due to variations in maintenance costs and, importantly, in the expected resale value at the end of the three year contract.

The Motability monthly price list can be accessed online

at [www.motability.co.uk](http://www.motability.co.uk) or by telephoning Motability on 0845 456 4566. The list contains only the most popular and best value models for each manufacturer. Full lists of all the models available can be seen at Motability accredited car dealers or by contacting the telephone numbers in the price list.

• Next month DN looks at the safety of vehicles converted to carry disabled people in their wheelchairs.



In and out: Noel Muddiman (left) will be a hard act to follow, while new director Don Brereton (right) has personal experience of disability

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# Stage right

Lack of opportunities and role models meant a career in theatre never seemed an option for Jamie Beddard. Here he charts his journey from disillusioned youth worker to associate director of Graeae, the leading integrated theatre company

A career in theatre and the arts seemed totally unfeasible when I was growing up. There were no role models and few, if any, positive representations of disability in the media. The idea of breaking through the misconceptions and barriers to become a performer seemed almost impossible.

Following school, and a year travelling, I studied sociology at Kent University. My limited academic pretensions were soon dashed as I indulged in late nights, cheap ales, and idle pleasure. More by luck than judgement I gained a mediocre degree, and returned to London to set about earning an honest living.

As a youth worker, I pitted my wits against the young people of north-west London. My stand-off with the disaffected young was broken by a call from the BBC. They were casting *Skalligrigg* – a “groundbreaking film on disability” – and in the absence of trained actors with cerebral

palsy, had stumbled across my name. With no previous acting experience or aspirations, and much truth-bending, I managed to blag a role. At last, the wayward young of Kilburn were ditched, in favour of greasepaint, pink gin and professional pretence!

After *Skalligrigg*, I contacted Graeae theatre. The company offered a completely new world that I found exciting, challenging and sociable. After attending various workshops, and being inspired by many of

of working for a company such as Graeae is that disability is not really an issue; most of the barriers of understanding and access have already been dismantled. Also, disabled people share many cultural connections, and Graeae is at the forefront of representation of these issues.

A couple of years ago, I applied under an Arts Council Bursary Scheme to work as assistant director. I had run many workshops, and had always been interested in

**‘I’m fortunate to be doing a job I enjoy, at a time when the representation of disability is evolving’**

the arts practitioners associated with it, I tentatively decided upon pursuing a career as an actor. I made the switch to the professional, touring company and as a freelancer was fortunate enough to be involved in various Graeae productions, including *Ubu*, *Flesh Fly* and *Fittings* – *The Last Freakshow*.

One of the main advantages

stretching my muscles as a director. Working for Graeae in this new role offered insights into the various disciplines that work together to make theatre. As an actor your focus is on performance – learning lines and characters, preparing for shows, and fighting nerves – and you are largely unaware of the work that goes on



CLAIRE SADDLETON

“May the show begin”: Jamie at the Graeae office

behind the scenes.

One of my main areas of responsibility as associate director is to work with emerging and established writers. As a writer, I understand the difficulties posed by deadlines and finding inspiration. There is, however, a reservoir of talent among emerging disabled writers. Graeae’s role in nurturing these voices is becoming as integral as it has traditionally been for performers.

Writing provides exciting opportunities for those who may otherwise have been excluded from the arts, and there is no reason why Graeae shouldn’t be centrally placed to harness these new and different stories.

We also provide the Missing

Piece training course in conjunction with London Metropolitan University. Starting again in September, this is an intensive eight-month training course for disabled people in Performing Arts, and has over the last four years generated a wealth of talent.

I’m fortunate to be doing a job I enjoy, at a time when the representation of disability is evolving and the negative stereotypes of the past are becoming obsolete. A pool of great disabled performers now exists, and the industry can’t afford to ignore them.

Barriers and excuses are no longer acceptable. May the show begin.

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